

COMM 306 White Paper Guidelines & Performance Evaluation

WHAT IS A WHITE PAPER?

A white paper is an authoritative document intended to fully inform the reader about a particular topic. It combines expert knowledge and research into a document that promotes a specific solution or recommendation. A white paper allows the reader to understand an issue, solve a problem, or make a decision. The content is research-based and tends to have a formal tone. In government settings, white papers are a way to present policy preferences before legislation is introduced. Publishing a white paper tests public opinion on controversial policy issues and helps the government gauge the potential impact. In business settings, white papers are often used as a marketing tool to demonstrate thought leadership and establish credibility.

SELECTING YOUR WHITE PAPER TOPIC

Your white paper should identify and address a clearly-defined problem for a specific audience. For this assignment, imagine that you are a strategy consultant providing a recommendation to a public, private, or not-for-profit organization or agency facing a challenging strategic moral dilemma. Your paper should be problem-based and solution-focused. The problem should be relevant and timely and your solution must be based on a thorough examination of the problem, stakeholder perspectives regarding the issue, and potential options for resolving the problem.

In order to find a topic that is relevant and timely, search current media releases. What is happening in the business and societal context that is highly controversial, complex, and not easily solved? It is not expected that you will be able to solve global issues like hunger or world peace through your white paper in this class! The goal is to focus in on a specific business-related issue. Try to learn as much about the issue and the conflicting stakeholder perspectives as possible and provide your audience with a path forward that is desirable (makes sense to and for people), viable (able to be accomplished with the current resources and constraints), sustainable (able to become part of a long-term strategy), and ethical (minimizes harm/maximizes benefits).

Once you have selected your topic, complete the ***White Paper Proposal form*** and submit to your instructor for approval.

RESEARCHING YOUR WHITE PAPER

White papers cannot be written the night before they are due! This is an analytical paper, not an opinion paper, therefore in order to be valuable the selected topic must be comprehensively researched. Seek out information from online references, industry resources, and academic sources. White papers are data-focused and should be supported by significant research from credible, reliable sources. There is no hard and fast rule on the number of citations, but you must cite any information that is not public knowledge and that you didn't know before beginning your research. For this assignment, use APA formatting for in-text citations and references. Remember, the reader's confidence is likely to increase as the number of cited, credible references increases!

WRITING YOUR WHITE PAPER (*Maximum length: 10 pages not including the title page, table of contents, executive summary, appendices, or references*)

- **Title Page:** Choose an accurate title. A good title should be enticing and clearly indicate what the reader will learn from the white paper. Identify who the paper is prepared for, who it has been prepared by, and the date of submission.
- **Table of Contents**
- **Executive Summary:** Provide the reader with a brief overview of the paper's main points.
- **Introduction & Description of Issue:** Clearly describe the purpose of the report. The issue must be clearly explained and placed in context to ensure its importance is understood by the reader. Explain the goal of the paper and the value to those trying to solve this problem. Why is an effective response to this issue important/significant to your client and relevant stakeholders?
- **Background and Analysis:** Provide the background information required for the audience to grasp the complexities of the issue and, ultimately, the solution. Sub-headings in this section should include:
 - **Situational Analysis:** Briefly highlight any *historical* events/factors that have led up to this situation. In addition, identify *current* factors or trends that are impacting the situation that should be taken into account as future decisions are made (you may find the PESTEL framework useful for examining these factors). Given this situational analysis, what life cycle stage does the issue appear to be in? What is the significance of this stage from a strategic perspective?
 - **Stakeholder Analysis:** Complete a detailed analysis of stakeholders using an identification table, power/interest matrix mapping, and narrative summaries as appropriate to structure your analysis and communicate your findings. You may find some of the following questions helpful to consider as you conduct your analysis:
 - Identification: Who has a vested interest in this situation and in future decisions made by the organization? Note: when identifying stakeholders, consider who is going to be impacted by decisions made, as well as who might have the ability to influence the strategic/operational decisions and positively/negatively impact the future performance of the organization.
 - Perspective: What are the views of these stakeholders on the issue? What is important to them? What is their level of interest in this situation?
 - Power: How much power do these stakeholders have to influence the situation and/or organizational operations? What are some of the tactics these stakeholders may use to exert and/or gain power?
 - **Strategic Implications:** Summarize and synthesize the key insights arising from your situational and stakeholder analysis. What are the most important factors to consider moving forward? What are the critical challenges or threats? What are some potential opportunities? Based on your analysis, clearly articulate what an optimal "go-forward" strategy must do.

- **Alternatives:** Outline three valid courses of action that could be pursued going forward. By exploring different options, you help minimize bias and strengthen the credibility of your recommendation. Complete a pros/cons analysis of the potential alternatives.
- **Recommendation:** Use decision criteria to evaluate the alternatives. Based on your analysis, make a recommendation as to the optimal “go-forward” strategy. Clearly indicate how this recommendation best addresses the critical issues, considers the conflicting interests of key stakeholders, and promotes the common good ethically and strategically. Your solution should be desirable (make sense to/for people), viable (able to be accomplished), sustainable (able to become part of a long-term strategy), and ethical (minimize harm/maximize benefits).
- **Implementation Considerations & Conclusion:** Conduct a risk analysis and highlight any foreseeable risks, conflicts, or challenges that your client may face if they choose to implement this recommendation. Suggest ways to navigate these risks. Finish with any concluding remarks.
- **References:** Use in-text citations and reference all sources used to develop the white paper. Follow APA documentation rules.
- **Appendices:** Include supporting materials that are relevant to some readers but not all or may be too bulky to include in the body of the report (e.g. supplementary information, data tables, or large graphics). Title them Appendix A, Appendix B, Appendix C if there are more than one and refer to them in the body of the report.

FORMATTING YOUR WHITE PAPER

Writing quality includes the appearance of the document (layout, format), organization of text (headings, subheadings), writing flow, use of figures and tables, information and analysis, grammar and spelling, and overall report effectiveness/professionalism. ***You are to use APA style for citations and references however you can use business-style formatting for structuring your paper.***

- ***Appearance and Organization of Text:*** Use Calibri, Arial, or Times New Roman 12-point font with 1.15 line spacing, one line between paragraphs, and one-inch margins on all sides of the paper. Do not indent paragraphs. Use a proper heading structure so the document is easy to read and comprehend. Use bold font, italics, underlining, and numbered or bulleted lists as appropriate to improve “skim value.” Use the following techniques so your lists look professional:
 - Use numbered lists for items that follow a sequence or reflect a numbering system.
 - Use bulleted lists when items are not chronological.
 - Capitalize the initial word of each line.
 - Use end punctuation only if the listed items are complete sentences.
 - Use parallelism to make sure lines are consistent (e.g. starting each point with a verb).
- ***Flow:*** There should be coherence to the overall document. White papers should read as a single piece, rather than a set of separate sections between which there is no transition, consistency or coherence.

- **Grammar, Punctuation, Spelling, Sentence Structure:** Use available tools such as spelling and grammar checkers, and get others to proofread your report to help you identify potential errors or inconsistencies in spelling, grammar, punctuation, names and numbers, word choice, phrasing, tense, and format. Watch for writing errors such as sentence fragments, run-on sentences, and comma-splice sentences (joining two independent clauses with a comma).
- **Visual aids:** Incorporate tables and graphics as appropriate to clarify data, create visual interest, and make numerical data meaningful. Use the following points as a guide:
 - Clearly identify the contents of the visual aid with meaningful titles and numbering (e.g., *Figure 1 Internet Use at Canadian Companies*).
 - Refer the reader to the visual aid by discussing it in the text and mentioning its location and figure number (e.g., *as Figure 1 below shows ...*).
 - Locate the visual aid close to its reference in the text.
 - Strive for vertical placement of visual aids.
 - Give credit to the source if appropriate (e.g., *Source: Statistics Canada*).
- **Information** is the foundation upon which a solid recommendation is established. Information quality is a reflection of the degree of relevant research completed and the trustworthiness of the information collected. In order to ensure high quality information within your report, conduct sufficient secondary research to reflect a variety of sources and perspectives. Include information and data in your report from credible, reliable resources, making sure to ***cite and reference all sources using APA format.***
- **Analysis** requires careful consideration of the information gathered in order to identify key insights and provide a valuable solution or recommendation to the client. The quality of your analysis and the credibility of your conclusions/recommendations depend upon your ability to:
 1. Provide a clear chain of logic and reasoning throughout the report.
 2. Develop insightful, persuasive recommendations supported by reliable data and references.
- **Report Effectiveness:** Check to ensure your report reflects the following principles of effective business writing:
 - *Audience oriented* – you have considered this situation from your client’s perspective and have focused on addressing their needs and priorities.
 - *Purposeful* – you have provided your client with valuable information and insights based on credible data sources to address their primary questions and help them make important business decisions.
 - *Professional* – you have used language in your report that is client-focused and the tone is formal (but not pretentious), courteous, positive, and friendly.
 - *Economical* – you have presented your ideas clearly and concisely.

WRITING RESOURCES

It is important to highlight that this is an analytical paper and not an opinion paper. As such, you must seek out information from credible sources and make sure you cite your sources appropriately using APA format. Below are some resources you may find useful to support you in the writing process.

- Library for Business <https://libguides.usask.ca/business>
- APA Guide for Business Students <https://libguides.usask.ca/business/APAGuide>
- Using Grammarly in Edwards Classes V2.0
<https://students.edwards.usask.ca/techoffice/files/grammarly.pdf>
- The Writing Help Centre (Murray 142 - library.usask.ca/student-learning) can give you free one-on-one help with your paper. Here is a link for all of the resources they have to offer:
<http://library.usask.ca/studentlearning/academic-help/writing-help.php>
- Professional, Technical Writing Purdue Online Writing Lab (OWL)
https://owl.purdue.edu/owl/subject_specific_writing/professional_technical_writing/index.html
- Tone in Business Writing (Purdue OWL)
https://owl.purdue.edu/owl/subject_specific_writing/professional_technical_writing/tone_in_business_writing.html

PERFORMANCE EVALUATION

Your submission will be evaluated according to **content** and **competency level**. Basic content requirements for each component of the paper are outlined in the assignment instructions above. The level of competency (quality or skill level) with which those requirements are fulfilled will be evaluated using relevant Competency Framework descriptors. As more than one competency is typically utilized during the completion of each component, the performance rating will take into account multiple factors.

Report Component and Relevant Competencies	Performance Rating
Introduction & Description of Issue (moral awareness; social perceptiveness)	
Situational Analysis (moral awareness; social perceptiveness; use of tools)	
Stakeholder Analysis (moral awareness; social perceptiveness; use of tools)	
Strategic Implications (moral awareness; social perceptiveness; use of tools)	
Alternatives (synthesis; use of tools)	
Recommendation (use of tools; promoting the common good)	
Implementation Considerations & Conclusion (use of tools; moral commitment)	
References/Documentation	
Overall Demonstration of Strategic and Ethical Thinking, Problem Solving, & Decision Making (integration of all competencies)	
Overall Professionalism of Written Report (quality of written communication; organization, analysis, synthesis, integration, innovation; objectivity i.e. self-awareness; overcoming bias)	
OVERALL RATING (MAX 80 – to be converted to a grade out of 40)	